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ABSTRACT

The paper describes a 4-year secondary program for learning-disabled students which combines special education and guidance. A teacher from each discipline uses a combined approach for postsecondary preparation programming for the students. The program focuses on building self-esteem, motivation, trust, and respect. The program is described in terms of: (1) problem/need; (2) purpose, goal, and objectives; (3) student characteristics; (4) procedure; (5) evaluation; and (6) adaptation. Central to the program are eight "building blocks" which include helping students recognize their individual learning style, building organizational skills, developing study skills, utilizing computers for word processing, and learning to use compensatory strategies. Program evaluation data suggest that students are applying, are being accepted, and are attending postsecondary programs. (DB)

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UNPANNED GOLD: A four-year secondary program designed to direct learning disabled students to achieve fullest potential in furthering education.

ABSTRACT: This program features a unique combination of two disciplines, special education and guidance. A teacher from each discipline uses a combined approach for post secondary preparation programming for learning disabled students. The program offers a step-by-step construction process of attaining this goal. Included in these steps are the most vital issues of self esteem, motivation, trust and respect. Methods that teachers can use are provided in this program.

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I. PROBLEM/NEED

Section504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Health, Education and Welfare 504 Regulations of 1977 (PL-93-112) assured program accessibility for all handicapped persons at the post-secondary educational level. Learning disabilities are among those handicapped conditions included in the law. It was quoted in 1982 by Astin & Staff from the University of California that an estimated 6% of the 1982 Freshman class was learning disabled. There are many articles on file suggesting programs to support the Learning disabled student while in college. With these services more learning disabled students are staying in school and graduating.

A critical component is missing from the literature. Methods are needed to prepare and support the secondary learning disability student during the high school years to increase chances of college admittance at the college of choice. There is one study from the years 1940-1977 on file by Finucci, Gottfredson and Childs involving male students at Gow school in South Wales, New York . The school offers

a college preparatory curriculum where all students take courses in Reconstructive Language each year. This involves instruction and practice in reading and language skills primarily involved with phonics, word roots, derivations, and language structure.No current literature was found for secondary school programs specifically geared to assist the learning disabled student in his post secondary preparation.

The program which will be described has been in operation at Ellington High School, Ellington, Ct. for the past seven years. Ellington is a small but growing rural town northeast of Hartford, Ct. The highschool has an enrollment of 600 students in Grades 9-12. We service approximately 60 special education students with four Special Education teachers and an aide. This program ranges from self containment to mainstreaming with only a resource room study period.One of the special education teachers is also the Coordinated Work Study person for special education students. We have a full-time psychologist and a part-time social worker on our staff and three guidance counselors. We now have eleven learning disabled students in post secondary programs with zero "drop out" rate; and we had our first student graduate in April, 1988.

II. Purpose, Goal and Objectives

The purpose of our proposal is to share our secondary program with other high school personnel, middle school

personnel and administrators. The goal of the program will be to prepare a learning disabled student for post secondary education.

The objectives include stimulating and preparing every 8th through 12th grade learning disabled student to aspire to attend some kind of post-secondary education. The next objective would be to prepare the students for acceptance at this post secondary institution by honing their social and emotional strengths and, once accepted, to be successful. Included in this objective would be the student's ability to be selective in choosing courses according to individual strengths.

III. Student Characteristics

Our population is comprised of learning disabled students in grades 9-12 who can basically function within a mainstreamed environment with a resource room support program. We are looking to encourage learning disabled students with the potential that each one has the ability to apply, enter, and be successful at a post secondary institution, (technical school, two-year community college, four-year college). Our profile of the learning disabled student here at Ellington High School is contingent upon the definition of learning disabled as defined by the state of Connecticut. The guideline mandates a 22 point discrepancy between the Verbal and Performance section of the I.Q. and a discrepancy in achievement versus ability.

IV. Procedure

Preparing a learning disability student for a post secondary education cannot be done the last three months of school. It is most successful if a program of studies is planned by an 8th grade Planning and Placement Team meeting for entrance into highschool. Course selection is done by hand with the learning disabilities teacher and the guidance counselor. It is prepared prior to the Planning and Placement meeting so at the meeting we have a "packet" to present. We begin by scheduling a student with some degree of flexibility to accommodate a shifting of subjects from a general track to a more specific demanding schedule of courses necessary to prepare the high school transcript for college acceptance. This procedure has always included moving a student from a lower level to the next higher level. We have self contained classes and theb three academic level at our high school. These academic levels include a core curriculum requiring four English requirements, three math requirements, three science requirements and two science requirements. Our classes are , fortunately, small. Movement of a learning disability student to a higher level when he is deficient in major skill areas is primarily dependent upon the regular education teachers within the mainstream. You need the teacher's support and interest if the student is to succeed. Also, the classroom teacher needs continuing support and education.

We try to apprise our teachers of the latest literature findings in the field. We have ongoing informal discussions regarding a particular student and what that learning disability is and how it can best be addressed in the classroom using the student's strengths. We have found most of our regular education teachers to be excellent in their supportive roles. Many of our teachers recognize the student's learning strengths and styles and will accommodate these strengths into their presentation to the class. In some instances, when possible, we will match a student to a teacher.

How do we actually go about getting a learning disability student into college? There is an ongoing process of educating a student as to his true potential, simultaneous to building his self esteem by explaining what his testing score indicates. This is done by fully supporting a student in his academic selection by according him the respect of attending, listening, and responding to his needs so he experiences a degree of success. An element so very important but so subtle it often goes overlooked is the TRUST and RESPECT developed and shared between the student,parent, special education teacher and guidance counselor . Nothing is discussed or planned without the student being physically present and an active participant in expressing his feelings as to what direction he wants to pursue and what decisions he feels comfortable with. Listening is the most critical component. We cannot respond

appropriately unless we have heard what the student has shared. Nothing is sent home to a parent without the student being aware of the situation and if a written paper is to be sent home the student is given the courtesy to read it and ask for changes if appropriate. The student's confidence is never betrayed unless it is a life-threatening situation. This degree of trust measures how quickly the student is willing to "risk" moving to a higher level of academic study.

The building of trust and respect is an issue unto itself and is the basic component upon which our resource room concept is formed. Students respond more positively when adults are consistent, honest, open and supportive. The students receive no credit for this resource room study. It is an investment of his personal self. The building blocks are comprised of:

1. Self esteem and knowledge of self: what their learning disability is and how to make it work for them.
2. Recognizing their individual learning style and learning how to utilize their strength.
3. Realizing what "social skills" are and learning Attending skills, listening skills, observing skills, responding skills and initiating skills.
4. Organizational skills are vital for the success of this program.

5. Study skills follow the organizational skills and includes how to take tests.
6. Higher level thinking skills including problem solving, decision making, critical thinking and creative thinking are introduced at this time.
7. Computer familiarity and the use of the word processor using Appleworks or Bank Street Writer III with a spelling checker is an important tool to master for the college-bound learning disabled student. Our Special Education rooms each have Apple IIE computers and printers to be utilized by the students.
8. Compensatory Strategies include webbing, association techniques and alternate ways of notetaking.

The building blocks program is constant and ever changing to meet the individual student's needs. It is a continuous-type program worked on throughout the school year. There must also be a mutual respect of professionalism shared by the cooperating teacher, guidance counselor, the student and parent.

Once this level of trust has been developed a student is more receptive to suggestions which involve the students' taking a risk and moving into the mainstreamed classes needed for college acceptance. These changes need and demand the strong support of individual conferences, meetings with teacher involved and parent conferences during

this schedule change. It is at this period of time that the key word "motivation" becomes of utmost importance. The student begins to trust himself and believe in himself. He then becomes eager to continue onwards in a positive and stimulating direction. This then becomes intrinsic motivation. It is intrinsic motivation which determines the ultimate success of the student.

The scheduling becomes of primary importance to supply the needed direction for post secondary acceptance. Modification can now be put into effect. This may mean, at times, changes in a student's schedule which can take place at the Planning and Placement team. A change could involve a math program which would include decimals and fractions in order to meet the test requirement for entry to an automotive program at a technical school.

Accompanying the appropriate scheduling is exposure to colleges and college programs. This is done by a coordinated effort by the guidance counselor getting in contact with their key college admission people. Know your local college programs and their representatives so that you can match a student to a particular program. Simultaneously, special education teachers plan college visits with students to the college campuses. On the ride home there is time to share feelings and reflect on what we were told and what we saw; time to realize fears, anxieties and hope. It is usually at this time that a student really

begins to believe that a post secondary education may be a choice for him.

College scheduling is an art. Our guidance counselor converses personally with the key admission people. The counselor and learning disabilities teacher write individual personalized letters of recommendation stressing the uniqueness of a student and what strengths the student has to offer a particular school. The guidance counselor then convenes with the learning disabled student. They take a look at the total overview of the college curriculum choosing appropriate courses that will eventually count toward their general education requirement. In some instances extreme modifications of the college curriculum has been suggested so that a student carry only two or three courses a semester and meet those with success. Carrrying less than the full load for the first semester is NOT a bad way to start off!

Also, parallel to this exposure is the introduction of the parents to the Connecticut State Department of Rehabilitation Services. This is called transitional planning. The student meets the area coordinator of the Department of Rehabilitation Services with the assistance of our special education Cooperative Work Experience person and begins a foundation with which to receive services and monies provided by the state. Part of the service may

include total funding which is dictated by the Financial Aid Form filed by the parents.

V.

Evaluation

Statistics are available stating how many students we have in college programs, how many students have remained in college, how many are completing a college program, how many applied for college and how many were accepted. This is an important part of this program's evaluation.

These past two years have yielded the following data:

1986

8 graduating seniors

4 students applied to post secondary schools

4 students accepted to schools

3 students presently attending higher form education

1 student graduated with degree in Drafting/technical school

1987

14 graduating seniors

7 students applied to post secondary schools

7 students accepted to schools

7 students presently attending higher form education

The continuous feedback we receive from our graduates is the best evaluation tool we have at this time. Students who have chosen to attend the local community college come back

often for reinforcement and assistance with their English class assignments Other students come back to touch base and say "Thank You" during college breaks. We are beginning to see a pattern of students completing the two year program at the local community college and electing to transfer to our state colleges.

VI Adaptation

Parts of this program could be adapted or modified to meet the needs of students with physical handicaps and to some extent those with characteristics of socially emotionally maladjusted who are preparing for post secondary education.

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